



New year. Old you.

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 31st December 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Genesis 19:12-26

Introduction

Well, that was 2023! In less than 24 hours we'll have officially started another year. So what will 2024 bring? I'm sure there are plans we each have. There are events we are as sure as can be are coming. And of course, there is much that we cannot control. There is much that God will do that we cannot anticipate. And there may be big things we're hoping and praying will come to pass.

But there's also the little, but significant, changes we hope to see in our daily lives. Indeed, at this time of year, we all hear lots of talk about a *New Year, new you* — often connected with New Year's Resolutions to get fit, lose weight, eat better, read more, work less or work harder, or spend more time with friends and family, try new foods and so on, right?

The problem we face with those resolutions, though (if we're honest), isn't so much *what* we set out to achieve, but it's *us* that sets out to achieve them. That is, we might have fresh goals, but it's the same us. That is, we find that the date may have changed, but we haven't.

Now, I'm not trying to put you off making such changes in the coming months, or discourage you in attempting those things — I have a few hopes and aspirations myself — but I do want to draw a parallel with our spiritual lives. Because, as Christians, when we consider our walk with God, which is far more profitable to us than bodily exercise (because its effects last forever), we have the same problem. That is, it might be a New Year, but the problem is the old you. And it's the old me.

New Year, old you

This is what Paul grapples with in the book of Romans, that we studied earlier this year. And we read in Romans chapter 6:

Romans 6:1-14

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life .

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace .

So then, as Christians, we are to reckon ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God. We're not to let sin reign in our lives. But how does this happen? Well, it's not by our own efforts, for you see, our own nature, our *old* nature, is weak. Paul writes in chapter 7:

Romans 7:18

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

In fact, we see a war going on inside us as we wrestle with sin. We might not be slaves to it, but the desire to do it is still very much present. And Paul reaches a pivotal question a few verses later:

Romans 7:24

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

His conclusion? We can be delivered from it through Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

But how does that happen? Well, we read in the opening verses to Romans chapter 8:

Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but **according to the Spirit**. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in **us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit**. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. **So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.** Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

So first, and foundationally, Jesus has paid for our sin. We could never have earned our salvation, and it would be foolish to try. But given God's amazing grace in sending Jesus to die in our place, we are to live in response to that. But again, not through our own efforts, but by walking in the Spirit, who Jesus described as our helper. He said:

John 14:15-17

"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

Walking in the Spirit

So then, what does walking in the Spirit look like? What changes might we expect in the life of someone who has the Holy Spirit in them? Well, Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus:

Ephesians 4:17-24

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

If we were to read on through chapter 5 we'd see Paul continue by saying we should be imitators of God. That there be no fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, or dirty jokes. That we would not mix with those who do sin. And that we would recognise that our very identity has changed — that we were once darkness, but are now light.

And we'd see him go on to say that we should redeem the time, that we should understand what the will of the Lord is, and that we should not be drunk — but filled with the Holy Spirit. And going on from there he writes how that should evidence itself in the lives of wives and husbands, children and parents, employees and employers.

Furthermore, if we're walking in the Spirit, we should be displaying the fruit of the Spirit, as Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Galatians 5:16-26

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

What should be clear to us from these passages of scripture are that there are two things going on.

First a doing away with the old man. We read that those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh — but we must not. Rather, we read that we are to put off the old man, that there be a change in the way we conduct ourselves. Indeed, we read that those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh. That's a daily choice we're going to have to make. Perhaps even an hourly choice!

At the same time, the second thing that should be taking place is we should be setting our minds on the things of the Spirit, walking in the Spirit in everything we do. Indeed, we should put on the new man, which was created according to God, that we might point to Him in all we do.

How to walk in the Spirit

So how do we do those two things? Well, it's important to note that if we don't know Jesus as our Saviour, then we have no hope, for we are (as the Bible describes) slaves to sin — we can't help but sin. So, we need to come to Him first, putting our faith and trust in Him, at which point He will put His Holy Spirit in us. But having done that, if we know Him, we can go to Him for help, for we read in the book of Hebrews in the New Testament:

Hebrews 4:14-16

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

So let us go to Him each time we are tempted to sin, asking for His help in the moment; that we may truly put to death the old man, that we might not sin. Yet furthermore, let us not neglect to set our mind on the things of the Spirit, that crucial second part those passages were telling us to do.

How do we do that, though? Well, our answer is found in how the early church, Jesus' disciples, conducted themselves. We read in Acts chapter 2:

Acts 2:42-47

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

We are then, to continue in the **Word** (reading it, studying it, teaching it, learning from it), and **prayer** (in private, in public, with our families, and with our Christian friends), in **communion** (publicly remembering what Christ has done for us), and in **fellowship** (growing with and toward other believers, serving, loving, equipping, encouraging, admonishing, and rebuking where needed).

And as we do that, praise and worship of God, and love and service toward Him and others should come naturally. That is, we'll know who we're praising and worshiping (and why), and it will be truly authentic because we'll have a living and active relationship with the One we're worshipping. Also, as we learn how He loved us, we'll see how we should love one another. And as we learn how He served us, we'll see how we should serve Him and one another too.

At what cost?

Now, that all sounds rather wonderful, right? But those things don't happen by accident. They require choice on our part. And that choice will mean rearranging our priorities. It will even mean giving some lesser thing up for the greater thing we really want. You see, it's easy to *talk* about how we want to know God more, and how we want to hear from Him, and know His will for our lives. But are we prepared to live as if we mean those things we say? Are we prepared to walk *that* closely with Him? To truly walk in the Spirit?

Let me put it another way; is there anything you are not prepared to give up for Him? I mean, we've all sung the song "I surrender all". But do you? Do I? As we enter a new year, I think it's a good moment to pause, and reflect on what we really hold dearly, and whether, in fact, we hold the world more dearly than we hold Christ. If we are going to crucify the flesh (along with its passions and desires), as Paul describes it in Galatians, that surely will reach every part of our lives, right?!

It will cost us our time — perhaps less time on social media, or watching movies, TV, or YouTube, or reading magazines, or playing computer games. And it will change the priority of our calendars — committing to fellowship and serving within our church family, as well as meeting with other Christians — making *those* things a priority.

It will cost us our comforts, as we turn out to mid-week meetings on rainy January evenings. And it will cost us our hobbies, as we skip sports matches, games, races and such — that we might be present at church, that we might serve God, that we might learn from His Word. It will cost us our possessions as we use that which we've already been given for His glory, and even cost us our money as we not only give our tithes and offerings to Him, but make our spending decisions or career choices in light of His Kingdom, rather than our own. And it may even cost us our friends, as we keep from those who would lead us away from God.

The point is, if we are truly to be His disciples, it will cost us something. It will cost *you* something in 2024. And it may be some of those things I've just mentioned. Or all of those things and more.

Now, maybe you think I'm being too harsh, too demanding. But what did Jesus say? We read in chapter 10 of Mark's gospel:

Mark 10:17-22

Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery; 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honour your father and your mother.' " And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Indeed, a good measure of how much our possessions have us, is whether we would be prepared to let go of them, and go without, for the cause of Christ. In a similar vein, we also read these words of Jesus in chapter 9 of Luke's gospel:

Luke 9:57-62

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

These passages make it abundantly clear that we need to be prepared to give up anything for His purposes, especially if those things would draw us away from Him. But even where the thing in question may be relatively benign in and of itself, we are to be willing to give it up if it gets in the way of us truly walking with the Lord and serving Him as we should.

So let me put it rather plainly; will you be at any of the Thursday evening prayer meetings this year? Or Sunday morning ones? Will you come to any of our evening services? Will you commit to fellowship outside of Sunday services — not merely for your sake, but for the sake of encouraging and fellowshiping with others? And will you be present at our outreach BBQs for the opportunity of sharing the gospel with unbelievers, or merely there for the burgers? Will you give of your time and finances as abundantly as God has given them to you? Will you love others until it hurts?

Closer to home, will you spend more time reading your Bible than you will catching up social media? Will you spend more time in prayer than you will watching or reading the news? Will you give more thought to Christ and His sacrifice for you than you will planning a holiday? Will you have more take-away meals than family times of prayer this year?

There's a lot we need to think about here. But not just think about, but act on too. For if we are going to walk in the Spirit, and set our minds on the things of the Spirit, then that will require some action on our part. It won't happen automatically.

A warning from scripture

As I start drawing to a close here this morning, I want to note a verse in the Bible that is easy to miss. But first, let me read the verse that follows it, in which Jesus said:

Luke 17:33

Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

This is clear and direct. We can try and hold onto all the things of this world, but it will do us no good. For we can take none of those things to Heaven. But rather, if we give up the rights to ourselves, as Jesus did for us, then we'll find our lives in Him — a far greater joy in this life, and an eternity of joy to look forward to. But let us note the verse that precedes it, where Jesus said:

Luke 17:32

Remember Lot's wife.

Three words. Just 3 words. One of the shortest verses in the Bible. But I suggest that we each make a note of this. In fact, this would probably be a far more useful verse to have as a fridge magnet than most you'll find in Christian bookshops, for this is a powerful example Jesus sets before us.

You see, as we read again in our reading this morning, and also studied a number of weeks ago in our studies through the book of Genesis, we see how Lot was graciously taken out of the city of Sodom (along with his wife and daughters) ahead of God destroying it and the city of Gomorrah too. And first, this should prompt us to consider how all that Lot had invested of his life there was gone in a moment. It was worth nothing. He was saved by the skin of his teeth. And likewise, all we build for ourselves in this world is worth nothing, if what we build is of the flesh.

But here, specifically, Jesus is talking about Lot's *wife*. And we read that when the time came for complete separation from her old life, she couldn't bare to do so, but rather looked back longingly at her old life, and died there, turning into a pillar of salt. In other words, she wasn't prepared to leave the things of the world for the sake of obeying God. That should cause us all to sit up and think.

Let me, however, talk about the thing I think I fear the most as a pastor. And that's not that God wouldn't add people to our number — be it existing believers looking for a church, or unbelievers coming to know Him. Neither is it fear that people in this fellowship wouldn't grow in Him, as important as that is. But rather, the thing I think worries me the most is that through the years there may be those who will sit here week after week doing a great job of blending in, singing songs, saying amen in the right places, but not actually knowing Jesus as their Saviour.

Lot's wife is a terrifying example of that. She was married to Lot, whom the Bible describes as a righteous man (despite his faults). A man who had left the comforts of Ur to travel with his godly uncle, Abraham, to live a life in tents because that was what God called him to. And she had seen God give Abraham the victory that freed Lot and her from captivity. And now, she had been rescued from Sodom ahead of its destruction, having heard the clear commandment of the Lord through the angels. But now, so very close to safety in Zoar, she turns around and gives one last longing glance at her old life — and she dies there. "Almost saved, but not quite" as Spurgeon comments.

It mattered not that her husband was described as a righteous man. It made no difference to her, in the end, that her husband and daughters were saved. It made no difference that she had seen God's provision, or His grace - what mattered was that she never took hold of the salvation He was offering, and rather in one final act of disobedience, looked longingly toward her life on earth instead. So let me put it to each of you, as far as *you* are concerned — it does not matter if your husband knows the Lord if you don't. It does not matter if your wife knows the Lord, but you don't. And it makes no difference if your dad or mum know the Lord, but you don't.

Unless you come to Jesus as your Saviour, putting your faith and trust in Him to save you, you will perish. You will spend eternity in hell. It's as simple as that. And absolutely nothing that this world has to offer is worth that.

Now, one final comment I would make about Lot's wife, is that Lot really didn't help her. Sure, he was described as a righteous man. Yes, he was deeply troubled by the sin he saw around him in Sodom. But he still lived there. He still led his family to live there. And just perhaps, if he hadn't been so settled in the world, his wife would not have grown such affection for it. So, noting this, let us take great care of our responsibility toward others — whether as older Christians, or parents, or youth and children's club leaders — to not spend so much time living in the things of world that those around us can't tell the difference between us, and what they desperately need to keep from.

Conclusion

I once read the comment "If you want something you've never had, you need to do something you've never done." And we need to be careful with such statements. But whoever wrote that made a helpful point. For if you want to see your walk with the Lord blossom this year — then what are you going to do about it? *Ah, but that's works, not grace* you say! No, no. We read, *draw near to God and He will draw near to you*. Not the other way around.

But furthermore, given all Christ has done for us — let us respond to Him, and to His amazing grace, by obeying His command to be holy as He is holy. Let us indeed walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh.

In closing then, here is something from AW Tozer that I've shared before, but seems fitting:

We tend to think of Christianity as a painless system by which we can escape the penalty of past sins and attain to heaven at last. The flaming desire to be rid of every unholy thing and to put on the likeness of Christ at any cost is not often found among us. We expect to enter the everlasting kingdom of our Father and to sit down around the table with sages, saints and martyrs; and through the grace of God, maybe we shall; yes, maybe we shall. But for the most of us it could prove at first an embarrassing experience. Ours might be the silence of the untried soldier in the presence of the battle-hardened heroes who have fought the fight and won the victory and who have scars to prove that they were present when the battle was joined.

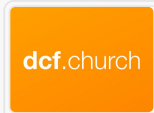
AW Tozer

Application questions

As you perhaps take a few moments after the service to pray, or as you sit down at home this afternoon, ask yourself some hard questions:

- What are you doing to kill off the old man?
- What are you doing to walk in the Spirit, and not the flesh?
- How do you think God would have you live differently in this coming year?

For the audio recording of this Bible study, and for additional studies, please see the DCF web site:



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